

# The Yak

# Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society



Fraser South Rhododendron Society  
is a chapter of the  
American Rhododendron Society

Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the  
third Wednesday of each month at:  
United Church Hall  
5673 - 200th Street  
Langley BC

[www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth](http://www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth)

## 2005 Officers

President: Bobby Ogdon  
604-572-9993

Vice Pres.: Dalen Bayes  
360-966-4596

Secretary: Mary-Anne Berg  
604-853-5737

Treasurer: Alan March  
604-532-9062

Directors: Les Clay - yr. 3  
Harold Fearing - yr. 2  
Colleen Forster - yr. 1

Membership: Wenonah March

Newsletter: Brenda Macdonald  
604-990-5353

Website: Chris Klapwijk  
604-888-0920

Volume 18 Number 3 March 2005

This Month's Meeting : Wednesday, March 16, 2005

Speaker: David Sellars

Topic: Alpine Flowers of the Dolomites

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show and Tell: Vern Finley

Plant Sales: Harold Fearing

## Quick Hits

### This Month....



- Don't forget that Les Clay will be collecting your order for summer perennials at this month's meeting. Have your payment (cash, or a cheque made out to FSRS) and completed order form (back of the brochure handed out last month) ready. This is a wonderful opportunity to obtain good quality plants at very reasonable prices and support fund raising for our chapter at the same time.



- Our annual Plant Show and Sale will take place this year on Saturday, April 9th, in the parking lot of our usual meeting place, from 10:00 am to 3:00pm. A sign-up sheet will be available at the March meeting. We will need cashiers, kitchen help, customer service agents, and a few navvies to lift and tote.



- Bring a truss, any truss, to any meeting. Share the wealth. See Notes From the Editor for more information.



## A FIERCE COMPETITOR BUT A GENTLE SPIRIT

I remember her as quiet and diminutive with an unassuming attitude and a gentle, caring spirit. It was not what I expected in a fiercely competitive exhibitor of prize rhododendrons and azaleas. Gene Round's garden revealed diligent oversight by at least two expert growers and propagators: she and her husband Ron. Innumerable rhodos jostling shoulders for their very existence, and many of great age, overflowed meandering beds that wrapped around the stately property. The statuesque plants were stubbornly surviving in an elderly neighbourhood embracing redevelopment. Sandwiched among the grand, venerable monarchs were hundreds of proud, newly rooted cuttings and precocious seedlings competing for nutrients from the soil, and attention from admirers of the garden.

### From the President

Many of the plants predated Ron and Gene's (she prefers this spelling rather than "Jean") occupancy of the estate. Most qualified as old ironclads that had weathered the vicissitudes of previous owners for several decades. A healthy balance of species and hybrids were added later when their gardening interests focused on ericaceous plants. The established gardens were augmented with personally propagated rhodos, some from cuttings acquired from friends in VRS or from the Rhododendron Species Foundation in Federal Way, Washington. A few self-pollinated seedlings and own hybrids were added each year. Do not think, however, that Gene was an inferior hybridizer. On the contrary, some of her crosses were received with rave reviews at shows and competitions. Her cross of Lem's Cameo with Anah Kruschke is exquisite.

Situated on Rochester Avenue a mere chip shot south of the Vancouver Golf Club, the home was nevertheless hidden away in a formerly bucolic area of Coquitlam overlooking the Brunette River. In my acquaintanceship with Gene I had always known her to be a widow. Her beloved Ron died shortly after their involvement in the VRS. Actually VRS is an anachronism. When the Rounds joined the Rhodo Society it was The American Rhododendron Society, Vancouver Chapter. In memory of Ron, Gene donated a trophy awarded to the best novice entry in the annual competitive show. It was her way of stimulating new members to exhibit their plants. I do not know if Ron entered trusses or plants in the competitions but Gene certainly did. The show was a priority for her calendar. Active preparations began the previous spring with her faithfully and thoroughly deadheading, so her plants would produce the highest quality blooms. Early spring saw her balancing plant nutrition and watering.

For me, Tuesdays were teaching days at Simon Fraser University. On my way home to Surrey I frequently stopped by Gene's garden to see what was new and in bloom. Readily welcomed, she might include a cup of tea and a snack, but would usually just lead me to the propagation box in the basement, working its magic under grow lights, adjacent to the seeding box. Of course the route to the kitchen passed through the huge back porch, whose walls displayed her whole history of show ribbons and latest trophies, systematically categorized by year and placing.

While not formally educated as a horticulturist, Jean was bright and well read, with a love of rhodo genera. Her expertise as a teacher was infectious. I learned from her: plant health is a result of care throughout the year, not just the week before the show; the garden is an extension of your personality; a show of your trusses and plants can be an accurate assessment of your horticultural skills; a wide variety of rhodos and azaleas, with their uniquely individual nutritional requirements, stretches you as a gardener; take cuttings judiciously so as to spare the plant's flower buds; give to others as you have been blessed by the garden's bounty.

The wide range and size of rhodos in Gene's garden afforded her the opportunity to give cuttings, rooted cuttings, or seedlings to guests and friends. I was blessed to receive many wonderful offerings over the years. A cutting of *R. smirnowii* grew into a plant that never ceased to win when I entered it in competition.

In Gene's garden the ordinary was made to appear spectacular. Surveying her accomplishments via the ribbons revealed a dearth of the "weird and wonderful" varieties coveted by others. Gene preferred the standard tried and true varieties. But, her plants were far from average. Each one was a work of art, standing uniquely above the competition. She grew quality rhodos, healthy, vibrant,

thriving, floriferous plants, with delectable blossoms. I wish I could take you through her garden today. Unfortunately it is no longer in existence.

As the garden inexorably expanded it grew beyond her ability to cope. Gene's daughters suggested she move to newer housing with fewer maintenance problems, and little or no garden. It was an eminently wise yet emotionally painful decision. The family home would be recycled in keeping with the burgeoning new construction in the area. But, what about the plants? One would think the developer would use them to landscape the sub-divided properties. Wrong! A week after Gene's departure the house was razed. Nearby a huge pile of beloved rhodos were suffering the intense heat of a bonfire. A small number of plants had earlier been salvaged by rhodo aficionados, but most were summarily destroyed.

Gene Round was a surprising influence in my horticultural life. One day I was able to surprise her. It seems I had met Ron Round a decade before I met my first rhodo. He was the soloist at a wedding—mine. Judy and I were married at First Presbyterian Church, New Westminster, where Ron was the music director. He was as adept as a chorister as, I would later learn a cultivator. I thank God for Ron and Gene's touch and influence on my life for nearly forty years. Rhododendron Societies have the nicest people!

*Bobby Ogdon*



From the Editor

## Last Month:

Last month we were treated to a fascinating glimpse of both the flora and culture of Vietnam and China as Peter Wharton, Curator of the David C. Lam Asian Garden at UBC, discussed the slides he had taken of his November, 2004, trip to that area. Peter had travelled there to participate in some plant biodiversity studies being done in conjunction with members of Capilano University College. Later on he was able to undertake some plant hunting expeditions with members of the Kunming Institute of Botany.

## This Month:

This month our own David Sellars will present a program on the Alpine Plants of the Dolomites, consisting of images collected last July, when David and Wendy hiked these picturesque mountains located in northeastern Italy.

## Next Month:

The speaker and topic for next month's meeting have not yet been finalized.

## Notes:

### *Refreshment Duty Schedule*

Cherry Groves, who has graciously agreed to take on the responsibility for coordinating the Coffee and Calories for our meetings, has written to say that the response to the call for volunteers has been outstanding, with only the October, 2005, meeting still unfilled. Keeping in mind that help in this area is not gender-specific, we are looking forward to a few more volunteers, some for October, and perhaps a couple of spares who could be called upon to fill any unanticipated gaps.

Here is the current schedule:

March	Dixie Mueller, Lori Bayes, Barbara St. Hilaire, Arlene Darby
April	Norma Senn, Mike Bale
May	Trevor Badminton, Karen Linton
June	(picnic)
September	Joan Bengough, Marge Mueller
October	~~~~~
November	Lori Bayes, Patti Bale
December	(Christmas)

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### *The All-Access Show (and Tell)*

Many members (with the exception of those of us living half way up one of the North Shore mountains) already have many rhodos in bloom. Bring in a truss or two, with labels, to share with others. Nothing is quite so enlightening as seeing the actual plant - photos and descriptions just cannot convey the same level of information. We will put aside a display area so that everyone can enjoy and learn at each meeting. Although our official Truss Show takes place in May, many plants blossom either before or after that month, so we would like to maintain this display as a running commentary of what is currently in bloom and how it looks. You will not be expected to make any sort of formal presentation, but if you could include your name on the truss label it would allow other members to ask you any questions they might have about cultivation or habit.

### *Rhododendron of the Year Candidates for 2008*

Bill Stipe of Bainbridge Island is part of the "Rhododendron of the Year Committee" of the ARS. Starting in 2002, with ARS membership input, the committee has selected a Rhododendron of the Year in four different categories: elepidote rhododendron, lepidote rhododendron, deciduous azalea, and evergreen azalea. These designations are made on a regional basis since the cultivation needs vary so greatly between the locations of the various ARS chapters. Our region includes District 1 (BC), and Districts Two and Three (Washington).

Currently the committee is soliciting candidates for the selection of the 2008 year. The criteria to be considered in making these choices are:

1. Foliage should have good green color and retain leaves for at least 2 years, (except deciduous azalea).
2. Plant should flower and perform well in your region 4 out of 5 years.
3. Plant should be full and compact.
4. Plant must be cold hardy, bud hardy, and heat tolerant in your area.
5. All plants must be registered with the ARS.
6. All plants must be easily propagated.
7. Plants must be easily grown in the average garden, requiring low maintenance.
8. Plants should be resistant to disease.
9. Propagation material must be available for mass production and availability in 2008.
10. 2008 candidates cannot duplicate previous years selections.

The selections for previous years are:

Year	Lepidote Rhododendron	Elepidote Rhododendron	Deciduous Azalea	Evergreen Azalea
2002	Ken Janeck	Ginny Gee	R. schlippenbachii	Hino Crimson
2003	Taurus	PJM	Homebush	Purple Splendor
2004	Percy Wiseman	Dora Amateis	Arneson's Gem	Fascination
<b>2005</b>	<b>Horizon Monarch</b>	<b>Ramapo</b>	<b>Nifty Fifty</b>	<b>Hilda Niblett</b>
2006	Point Defiance	Wee Bee	Washington Centennial	Silver Sword
2007	Nancy Evans	Blaney's Blue	Cecille	Mitsuki

Here is your chance to blow a horn for your favourite rhododendron or azalea, one which fulfills all the criteria listed above, but which everyone else keeps ignoring. Let me know your suggestions, by email to [macdobr#shaw.ca](mailto:macdobr#shaw.ca) (substitute an @ for the # in the address in order to send it) or at the March meeting. I will coordinate the responses and forward them on to the committee.

### *Lumping and Splitting, cont'd*

The article last month by Dalen Bayes on his favourite rhododendron, which used to be a *Ledum*, prompted a response from a distant reader, Dr. Harri Harmaja of Finland. Dr. Harmaja is primarily a mycologist (expert on mushrooms and other fungi) but has also done taxonomic work on other genera, including Dalen's favourite, *Ledum*. Dr. Harmaja wrote to our website to update the current status of the plant that is noted on the RSF site as *Rhododendron tomentosum ssp subarcticum*. According to Dr. Harmaja, *R. tomentosum* is the new name for *Ledum palustre* and *R. subarcticum* is the new name for *Ledum decumbens*. And, since *R. tomentosum/L. palustre* does not occur in North America, it is most likely that what Dalen enjoys seeing spread across his tundra vista is *R. subarcticum*. Of course, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, and a wide open tundra spread with a *ledum/* rhodo by any name at all would still provide a welcome sight.

*Brenda Macdonald*



## COMPANION PLANTS

U is for (almost) Unpronounceable  
from the Maple Family  
Family: Aceraceae

Once again, and probably not the last time, I'm taking liberties with the generic 'U'. I have chosen a few varieties of Japanese Maples (*Acer palmatum*), that although hard on the tongue, are very easy on the eyes, and will grace any rhodo garden with a bit of shade and contrast.

**UENO YAMA** - one of the first to leaf out in the spring, in a surprising shade of orange (maybe not best with some of the early pinks?). The leaf is a typical *palmatum*, small to medium size, no more than 2-3" across. The blaze of color lasts for several weeks, gradually turning to a bright green for the summer, and then a golden orange in the fall. The shape of the tree is upright and broad-headed, vigorous when young, but maturing to only 15-18 ft tall.

**UKIGUMO** – also known as Floating Clouds, it is truly a vision in pastels, and should be given a bit of shelter from the hot afternoon sun. The leaf has a base color of light green, and is variegated in an unusual way – it is finely peppered with pink and white dots, rather than margined or blotched as most are. This gives a very soft overall coloration, but some of the leaves may also be entirely white or pink. If you purchase a young plant, don't be alarmed if there seems to be very little color in the leaves – the pattern takes time and maturity to develop, as in other variegated forms too. Leaf lobes have long points, are divided almost to the center axis, and may twist and curl, especially the more colored ones. The tree shows vigor when young, but takes on a low-branched shrubby form of only 8-10 ft with age.

**UTSU SEMI** – this one is really different! – chunky chubby lobes on leaves broader than long, and heavy substantanced. The bright green foliage opens with the lobes rimmed with purple-red, and goes pure crimson purple in fall. It develops into a short rounded tree only 10 ft or so, and wide spreading; a great contrast for the finely divided leaves of the 'dissectums' and the small leafed rhodos.

Do some experimenting to see which ones go best with your favorite rhodos. May I suggest possibly just burying a generously potted specimen in the ground for a year to see the timing of the colors, and then choosing a spot in your garden to compliment both the maple and the rhodos. This will avoid a further disturbance if it doesn't suit where you first think.

Happy Planting!

*Colleen Forster*



*Acer 'Ueno Yama'*



*Acer 'Ukigumo'*  
("Floating Clouds")



*Acer 'Utsu semi'*  
("Grasshopper Skin")

# Up the Garden Path with ..... Sweet Peas



March 2005

For centuries, sweet peas have been grown for their beautiful, fragrant flowers which come in shades of white, pink, red, blue and purple. Flowers can be bi-coloured, streaked or ruffled, and they are excellent for cutting. Most varieties are good climbers, but non-tendrils, dwarf selections are now available that are suitable for containers.

Usually when we talk about sweet peas, we mean the annual sweet pea, *Lathyrus odoratus*. However, there are many other species, most of which are herbaceous perennials. The best known perennial species in our area is the beach sweet pea, *L. latifolius*. This is an introduced plant that is found growing so commonly along our west coast beaches that many people think it is a native species. While not used a lot as cultivated garden plants, the perennial species offer plant breeders some interesting possibilities for adding new colour mixes to our garden annuals. One word of caution is needed about all sweet peas, no part of them is edible. Edible garden peas belong to another genus of plants.



'Ocean Foam' (above) and 'Queen of Hearts' (below) were two of the Henry Eckford "grandiflora" introductions



According to the American National Garden Bureau, there are varieties of annual sweet peas that have been grown continuously since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most famous heirloom varieties is 'Cupani', which has small, two-toned, fragrant flowers. Most varieties are more recent, and were derived from hybridizing work dating from the mid 1800's. The development of our modern varieties began in earnest with the work of English plant breeder, Henry Eckford, who produced the first grandiflora types of sweet peas. Many of Eckford's introductions are still grown, for example 'Red Rover', 'Queen of Hearts' and 'Ocean Foam'. The Spencer sweet peas are another strain that trace their origins back about 100 years to a natural mutation found growing on one of the estates belonging to the Earl of Spencer. The original mutation was selected by the head gardener and used for hybridization to develop sweet peas with large, ruffled flowers and a long blooming season. The Spencer strains are still very popular locally.



*Lathyrus odoratus* 'Cupani'

In recent years, non-tendrils sweet peas have been created to produce short plants suitable for bedding out or containers. Look for varieties like 'Snoopea Mix' or 'Explorer Mix', or any of the varieties from the 'Cupid' strain. Recently, New Zealand breeder, Dr. Keith Hammet, has been working on developing striped flower patterns and he has also re-focused breeding efforts on good fragrance. His striped varieties are included in the 'Streamers Mix' or look for a variety called 'Saltwater Taffy'. Especially fragrant varieties from Dr. Hammet's program include 'High Scent', 'April in Paris' and 'Renaissance'. These varieties are available from

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'Snoopea Mix' is one of the non-tendrill types suitable for containers or for bedding out



'Streamers' is one of the new striped or flaked introductions developed by Dr. Keith Hammet



'Renaissance' is one of the new highly fragrant introductions developed by Dr. Keith Hammet

Sweet peas grow best in relatively cool season climates, so they are well-adapted locally. They like to be started in cool soils and are among the earliest plants that can be direct sown in our gardens. Throughout the temperate garden world, a range of sweet pea varieties have been selected to bloom under varying day lengths. You may see varieties listed in American seed catalogues that are intended for more southerly latitudes since southern gardeners grow sweet peas as a fall and winter crop, so they need plants that bloom under short-day conditions. Such varieties might be of interest to those of you wanting a fall and winter greenhouse flower crop, but they are not suitable for our gardens. In B.C., we need varieties that bloom under long-day conditions and tolerate our summer growing temperatures. Buying seed from Canadian sources is recommended as these will be the appropriate varieties for our latitudes. Seed from English sources can also be grown successfully here as varieties selected for England grow under day length and temperature regimes that are similar to ours.

Seed can be direct sown once soils have drained and temperatures reach about 12C. To improve germination, nick the hard, waxy seed coats with a sharp knife to allow the seed to absorb water more quickly and provide even germination. Some people soak the nicked seeds in warm water for a couple of hours before sowing. I personally find this helpful, although written information usually states this is of no real benefit. Plant the large seeds about 5 cm deep and space them 10 to 15 cm apart in the row. Because germination can be erratic, sow three or four seeds per hole and then thin out the weakest plants once germination occurs. Germination takes between two and three weeks. If you have enough space, successive sowings over several weeks will allow you to cut flowers over a longer season.

Seeds can also be started indoors. Sweet peas are best sown in individual pots, one seed per pot, as they resent root disturbance at transplanting. Transplants can also be purchased from local garden centres. Choose small, healthy plants since seedlings that have become leggy or are pale in colour won't perform well in the garden. All transplants need to be hardened off before being moved out to the garden, and at transplanting, remove any flower buds or blossoms that are present. Sacrificing these early buds allows plants to develop a good root system before flowering begins, and ultimately, you will have better plants and more flowers.

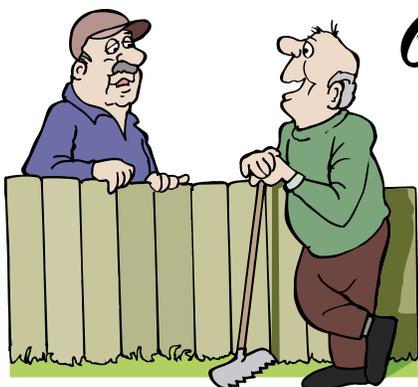
Except for the non-tendrill types, sweet peas are true climbers, so some sort of support is needed. Chicken wire or bird netting strung between upright support stakes make good climbing surfaces, or plant sweet peas along a fence or up a trellis. Stakes should be set out at planting time to avoid damaging delicate root systems. While sweet peas need good drainage, they also require even moisture, so a light mulch over the root system can be helpful. Summer watering may also be necessary.

A modest application of fertilizer at planting time is beneficial, but avoid over-fertilizing as this will lead to lots of vegetative growth, but few flowers. Once flowers appear, keep cutting them in order to keep new flowers coming. If flowers are left on the vines, they need to be dead-headed regularly to prevent seed formation. Once seeds begin to set, flowering will taper off.

The American National Garden Bureau has named sweet peas to be the "annual garden flower of the year". It's easy to understand their enthusiasm for this lovely, old-fashioned garden flower, and as you're looking through seed catalogues you may see new varieties featured as well as some of the older ones. Have some fun and grow at least a few.

*Norma Senn*

## Over the backyard fence . . .



Following Dalen's comments about *Rhododendron subarcticum* last month I have been trying to decide which my favourite rhododendron is. And like Dalen I don't know whether I can narrow it down to only one favourite.

What I can say is that there are a few which please me more than others, which seem to make me just plain happy. I can also tell you which rhododendron it was which first sparked my interest in the genus.

When my children were small I used to visit a cousin who had children of the same age; and a garden installed by a professional landscaper. Looking back on it now I realize that the landscaping design was actually fairly pedestrian, but there were a number of pink things, and despite its inherent unsophistication, I have a great weakness for pink.

One of the pink items was a rather nice weeping cherry tree, the single-flowering kind with masses of tiny, single, pink blossoms cascading down the somewhat twiggy habit, not the heavily doubled one which always looks like a bunch of trussed up ballerinas hanging off the thicker more awkwardly angled branches. This was a *Prunus subhirtella* 'Pendula' that was planted in an elevated bed (cherries don't like wet feet) which allowed it to droop rather attractively over the edge.

The other pink thing was a *R.* 'Mrs. G.W. Leak'. Actually it was a series of them, bunged in at regular intervals along the same fairly narrow elevated bed which housed the weeping cherry. But there they were, covered each spring with large trusses of blossoms in a pink so clear and pure as to be the definition of the colour. Not a gentle baby pink, or some sophisticated rose, but the transparent colour of pink glass, or those sparkley rings you used to get when you went to the dentist.

More than anything else, however, I think Mrs. Leak tickles my fancy because she reminds me of a hat my mother wore for a while. I had a little straw hat that had a couple of shiny red cherries, but my mother had a hat which was basically a sort of woven cloche matrix which was entirely covered (to my young eyes, anyway) with red and white and pink artificial flowers. It was a hat to be reckoned with and my mother had the height and looks to carry it off. It looked wonderful.

Mrs. Leak was one of the first things I planted when I bought a house on a 33' lot in Vancouver, so over the years I had to keep her rather



An individual blossom of *R.* 'Mrs. G. W. Leak'



*R.* 'Mrs. Furnival'

old-fashioned rangy habit in check. This was easily accomplished by dead-heading, and by religiously snapping off every new growth point that contained only a single shoot. If there had been a blossom there would invariably be at least two or three new shoots emerging from beneath the faded flowers, but some of the branch ends which had not blossomed would have only a single shoot. Snapping off that single shoot would force the auxins (growth hormones) back into the dormant buds immediately below, and a few weeks later there would be two or three new shoots emerging. Years of this activity resulted in a very dense, somewhat artificially compact, and very floriferous shrub, which, in blossom, grew more and more to look like my mother's spectacular hat.

The dead-heading and pinching back was not really an onerous job - it only took a couple of hours - but it was definitely one that needed prior preparation. Mrs. Leak has buds which are among the stickiest I have ever encountered, so although it is always rewarding to see the weevils and aphids stuck up by their own greediness, a pair of rubber gloves covered with Vaseline is the only way to avoid fingers so badly stuck together that opening them up to snap off the old blossoms becomes almost impossible.

Mrs. Leak has a companion, Mrs. Furnival, who although not of the same lineage

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R. 'Mrs. G. W. Leak  
showing the large, domed truss and  
the olive-green, somewhat leathery  
leaves'

at all, is sometimes confused with her. To my eye, the difference is instantly recognizable, even from far away. In fact, probably more easily from far away, since the descriptors are almost exactly the same, both pink with darker blotches on the flares and rather non-descript, somewhat leathery olive-green leaves. But it is the overall look, the “gestalt” as Steve Hootman would say, which tells the difference. Of course I describe it in terms of Mrs. Leak’s “cleaner” or “clearer” blossom colour and “perkier” look, but a more accurate comparison would show that the Mrs. Leak blossom is slightly frillier, with the flare being slightly less convex and blunt looking, and that the colours of Mrs. Leak have slightly more contrast than Mrs. Furnival, with the blotch being somewhat darker and there being a paler zone towards the edge of the flower. Mrs. Furnival’s pink always seems to me to be slightly more solid, less transparent. It is certainly more uniform, with little if any gradation, and the blotch is rounded, like thumb-print, whereas Mrs. Leak’s is slightly more angular, like a fountain spray.

I have included images scooped from the website of the Oregon State University, since they are the most accurate colour renditions I have seen in a long time. At least on my computer screen they are. Of course the problem is always in the translation to a printed page, which is why so few publications have photos which actually look like the plant you are looking at. Looking at



R. 'Mrs. Furnival' on the left  
R. 'Mrs. G. W. Leak on the right

books to see what a plant looks like is always a bit like trying to figure out the colour of your car under a sodium street lamp at night. Does it really look blue, or do you just remember that it was supposed to look blue.

In any event, Oregon State serendipitously had a photo which compared the two ladies rather effectively, so I have included it also.

And next time, I will talk about my other current favourite, a plant which is the antithesis of everything Mrs. Leak-ish. It is small, somewhat finicky, and comes in a series of colours which are strangely opaque, almost muddy looking. Nevertheless, *Rhododendron campylogynum* makes me smile each time I look at one of them.

*Brenda Macdonald*